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## FP-13-02 Public Assistance Participation among U.S. Children in Poverty, 2010

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# Public Assistance Among U.S. Children in Poverty, 2010

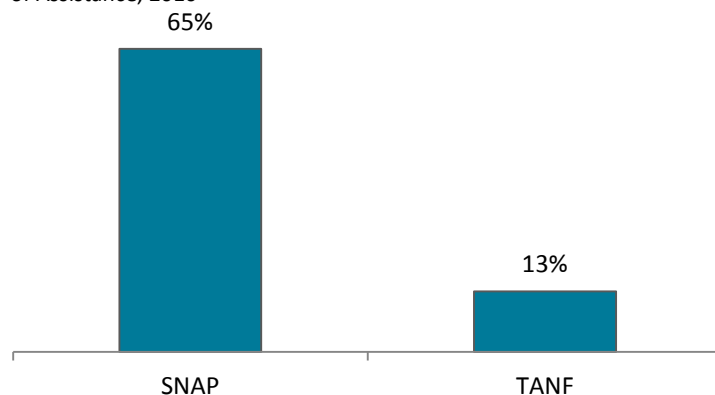
Seth Williams

Today, 21% of children in the U.S. live in families with incomes below the federal poverty threshold (FP-12-17). The purpose of this profile is to assess how public assistance program participation varies among disadvantaged children according to family structure, race-ethnicity, and nativity. Specifically, data from the 2010 American Community Survey 1-year estimates are used to examine poor children's participation in two programs: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as food stamps) and public cash assistance, including Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Eligibility for these programs is complex, and income requirements vary significantly by state. For more information on eligibility, see "Notes on Eligibility" below.

## Public Assistance Participation by Type of Assistance, 2010

- More than three in five (65%) poor children receive SNAP assistance as shown in Figure 1.
- A smaller portion of poor children receive cash assistance through TANF (13%), and 12% of children in poverty rely on assistance from both programs (not shown).

Figure 1. Public Assistance Participation of U.S. Children in Poverty by Type of Assistance, 2010

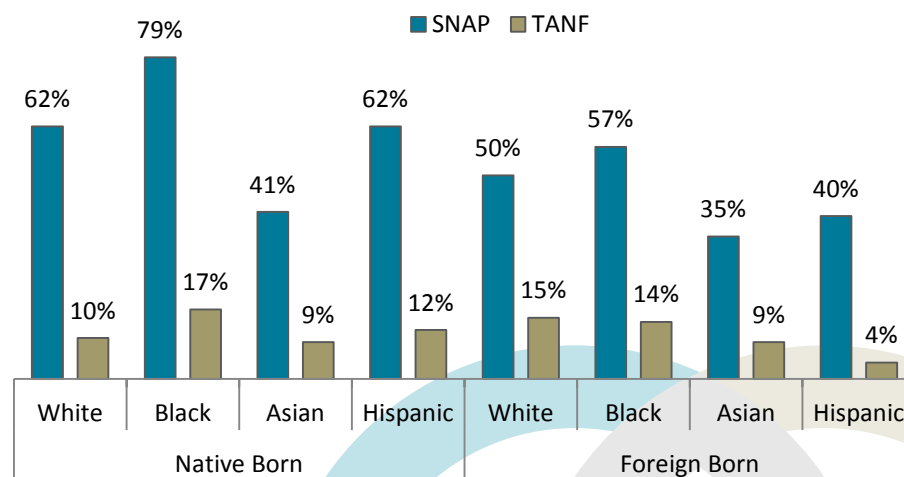


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 1-Year Estimates, 2010

## Child's Race, Ethnicity, and Nativity

- Native-born children are more likely to receive aid than their foreign-born counterparts.
  - Among poor native-born children, Blacks are the most likely to receive SNAP (79%) and TANF (17%), whereas Asians are the least likely to receive either form of assistance (41% receive SNAP, 9% receive TANF).
  - Among poor foreign-born children, Blacks are the most likely to receive SNAP (57%), and Whites are the most likely to receive TANF (15%). Though Whites and Blacks are the most likely to receive public assistance, they each comprise a small portion of poor foreign-born children, 10% respectively. Nearly two-thirds (65%) of poor foreign-born children are Hispanic.
  - Foreign-born Asians have the lowest rates of participation in SNAP (35%), and foreign-born Hispanics are the least likely to receive assistance through TANF (4%).

Figure 2. Public Assistance Participation Among U.S. Children in Poverty by Race/Ethnicity and Nativity, 2010

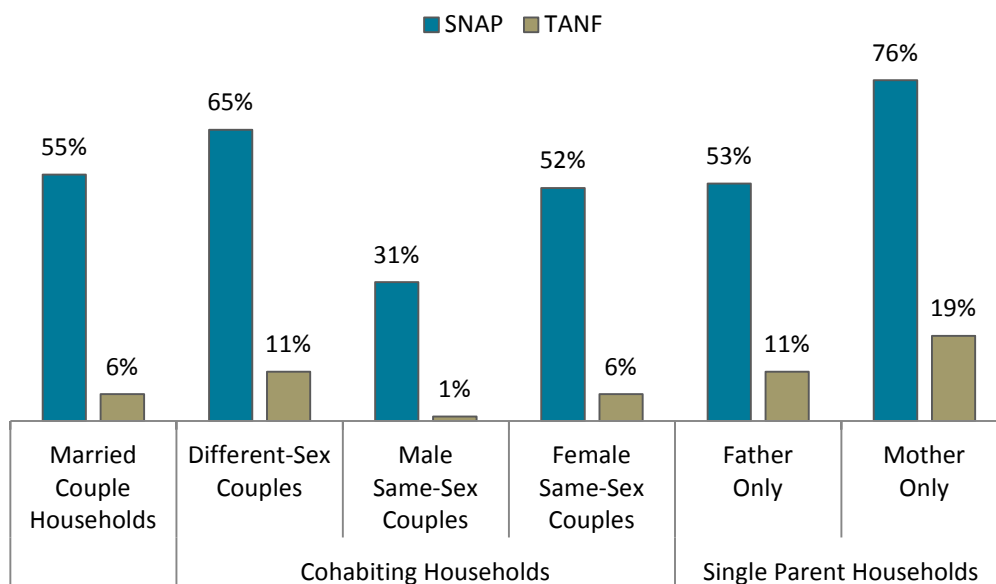


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 1-Year Estimates, 2010

## Family Structure

- About half (55%) of poor children in married households receive SNAP as do nearly two-thirds (65%) of children in different-sex cohabiting households.
- Children in male same-sex cohabiting households are less likely to receive both forms of assistance compared to those in female same-sex cohabiting households (31% vs. 52% for SNAP, 1% vs. 6% for TANF).
- Children living with a father only are less likely to receive assistance from either of the two programs than children in mother only families (a difference of 43%) or TANF (a 73% difference). Children in mother only families are the most likely of any group to receive assistance from either program (76% receive SNAP, 19% receive TANF).

Figure 3. Public Assistance Participation Among U.S. Children in Poverty by Family Structure, 2010



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 1-Year Estimates, 2010

**"Notes on Eligibility":** TANF is a federally funded program, where funds are distributed to states in the form of a block grant. How the funds are used is left to the discretion of each state, so long as it follows the basic guidelines laid out in federal law: "(1) provide assistance to needy families so that children may be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives; (2) end the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage; (3) prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and establish annual numerical goals for preventing and reducing the incidence of these pregnancies; and (4) encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families" (HHS). Only families with a dependent child 18 and under qualify. What constitutes a "needy family" varies markedly among states. For example, in 2010, the maximum monthly family income for a family of three (one parent and two children) was \$1,203 in California and \$393 in Florida. The federal poverty threshold for a family of three in 2010 was \$1,525 (Hahn, Golden, & Stanczyk, 2012). SNAP eligibility is determined by the ratio of family income to the federal poverty threshold. To qualify, families' gross income must be less than or equal to 130% of the federal poverty threshold, and their net income must be less than or equal to 100% of the poverty threshold. Certain exceptions are made for households with elderly people or people receiving certain disability payments. Cases where all members of a family receive TANF or SSI assistance result in automatic eligibility for SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, 2012).

### Sources:

1. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (2012). In USDA. Retrieved October 15, 2012, from [http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/applicant\\_recipients/eligibility.htm#income](http://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/applicant_recipients/eligibility.htm#income)
2. Hahn, H., Golden, O., & Stanczyk, A. (August 2012). State Approaches to the TANF Block Grant: Welfare Is Not What You Think It Is. Working Families Paper 20. The Urban Institute. Retrieved October 15, 2012, from <http://www.urban.org/publications/412635.html>

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